

Vanderpoel (S. O.)

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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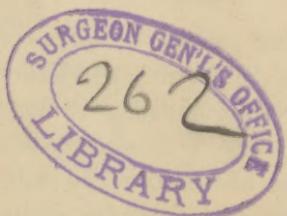
SIXTY-FIFTH MEETING

OF THE

Medical Society of the State of New York.

By S. OAKLEY  VANDERPOEL,

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.



A D D R E S S .

Gentlemen of the Society :

The return of another anniversary season permits the interchange of cordial greetings among members gathered from every portion of our great State. Each one brings the garnered ideas and experience of the year to add to the common store, and receives in return fresh vigor and encouragement to labor in the endless duty of relieving suffering and sickness.

The social element fostered by these annual gatherings is by no means the least important benefit accruing to the members; while it is no less instrumental in encouraging the growth and prosperity of the society. In the twenty years with which I have been conversant with its workings, it has passed from thirty or forty up to over two hundred.

The physician, from the very nature of his avocation, seeks the intercourse of his fellows, since, professionally considered, his position is peculiarly isolated. While his duties call for constant activity, and while he minglest with a varied and incessant round of persons, still his professional life, in which his thoughts and aspirations are constantly directed, finds in its natural channels no responsive element; he must meet responsibilities, apply a ready tact and knowledge, stand firm amid suffering and sorrow, without the strengthening influence of friendly professional aid. The other professions, acting in a different forum, bring their members in constant personal communication, derive from one another mutual suggestions and support,

and so preserve more spontaneous and unvaried fraternal and social relations. It is for this reason that medical men should especially cultivate all organizations which bring them in personal relations with their fellows. They will thus learn to know each other better; while suspicion and prejudice, which are so often engendered by isolation, will become disarmed. They, too, will find their professional armor strengthened in the interchange of thought and experience, and will return again to the routine of care, inspired by new thoughts, a disposition for closer analysis, and in what was before the barren field of drudgery and toil, discover fruitful themes for scientific observations.

If there were no other reasons, this one should cause physicians to cherish especially their local as well as their general organizations. Indeed, point me to localities where medical men act in fraternal relations, or where a common zeal inspires advancement, or where the highest aim of the profession is alone recognized, and I will show you that there medical assemblages are most frequent, and medicine in its scientific and humanitarian relations most assiduously cultivated.

In this connection it gives me pleasure to bear testimony to the spirit of activity which has been shown in the cities of New York, Albany and Buffalo, during the year, in maintaining, with the exception of the summer months, semi-monthly meetings of their local organizations. Even in the country districts, where association is more difficult, this necessity for personal intercourse and exchange of sentiment is so keenly felt that organizations comprising the physicians of three or four adjacent counties are formed, and meet at stated intervals for improvement. In addition to those in the southern tier and in south-western New York, one has been formed in northern New York, comprising the district of St. Lawrence, Clinton and Franklin counties.

The benefits which accrue from these organizations are not confined to the members, for the medical press, never more active, nor more worthy of commendation, publish full abstracts both of papers and debates, and thus disseminate to the profession at large thoughts which would otherwise be confined to the society. This publication of the proceedings by the medical journals exerts a reflex benefit upon the local organizations. It cannot have escaped the observation of those who read these reports that the most mature minds of the profession are taking part in them, instead of allowing, as has been too much the practice, the society to be sustained by the younger and more enthusiastic members. They feel and know that the medical press, like the secular, is the great lever for improvement

and advancement, and that by no other channel can the fruits of study and experience find so ready access to the mass of the profession.

A rule of the society which has for some time prevailed, and to which time has given the sanction of a by-law, prohibits the publication of any paper in the Transactions, the whole or any part of which may have previously appeared in print. While the general principle upon which this is founded is eminently proper, still its stringent application is, I think, calculated to work detriment to the true advancement of the society. If I appreciate the subject correctly, the volume of Transactions for each year should, as nearly as possible, represent the status and mental activity of the profession throughout the State. As such it is, I think, regarded in other localities. In reality we know it is by no means the case. The activity which we have noticed as prevailing in many of the medical societies throughout the State, has probably been more fostered and stimulated by the prompt publication of their proceedings in medical journals than from any other influence. It is but a few years since that it was scarcely possible to gather more than a quorum at the anniversary meetings of the medical society of the county of New York. Now that the proceedings are fully reported, the meetings are far more frequent, the attendance large, and the most cultivated talent of the city present. Whoever is conversant with these reports knows full well the ability, learning and observation which characterize them, and which would be far more properly considered a reflex of medical activity in this State than the volume of Transactions as now restricted. This rule induces, also, a quasi antagonism between the "Transactions" and the medical journals, a position which no one can desire to favor. Each has its peculiar and respective field; each almost an entirely different set of readers. Journals catch up the daily, weekly scintillations which emanate from the medical mind, spreading them before the active worker to strengthen experience or widen observation; while the "Transactions," less varied in topics, pass to a larger and in some measure more secluded class, who, from the very force of circumstances, often times are restricted to the Transactions as their quantum of medical literature for the year. The long interval which elapses between the presentation of a paper and its publication in the Transactions, prevents the reading of papers at these meetings which otherwise would naturally have been introduced. If a writer has views of immediate interest or priority of observation to submit, he will seek that channel which most speedily places them before the profession. Under the present rule a year must elapse before they

pass beyond the society. Could any detriment occur, if, after the reading of a paper here, it should be printed in a medical journal; or would it be less worthy of publication in the Transactions? Let me, therefore, suggest that medical organizations be allowed a larger latitude than at present in the recommendation of papers and debates for publication; and that, after the reading of a paper here, it may not be debarred publication in the Transactions, if, in the mean time, it was deemed of sufficient interest to publish it in some journal. The able and conservative censorship of the publication committee must still decide upon the *merits* of papers and debates for publication.

In conformity with the suggestion of my predecessor, this society at its last meeting took a most important step in recommending more thorough study of nervous diseases. Resolutions were unanimously passed, recommending both didactic and clinical teaching in our medical schools on insanity, and other cerebral and nervous affections. Several schools have already responded to the expression of the society, and during their present terms are introducing partial courses in this class of studies. While it is true that the recent progress of this branch of medicine is mainly due to the labors of comparatively few men, and these engaged specially in hospitals, still the fruit of these labors should be disseminated as much as possible among the mass of the profession. If the general practitioner is made conversant with the earlier phases of the different forms of insanity, or taught to recognize the early symptoms of what are generally termed nervous diseases, many cases which now terminate in prolonged insanity could be averted, or years of suffering be spared, in rightly appreciating the character of the nervous affection. It is, therefore, matter of congratulation that this society was the first in this country to recognize the just claims of this section of medical practice, and to take the initiative in recommending that hereafter it should constitute a requisite part of the curriculum of study.

Probably the greatest impediment to positive advancement in the knowledge of the different forms of insanity and nervous diseases has been the difficulty of verifying any fixed pathological changes in the nervous tissue, or any of the internal organs, with the clinical history during life.

Manifestly, any attempt at such verification in private practice would be utterly impossible. Cases are too rarely met, while the pathological changes in the nerve tissue are usually too minute to be recognized except by the practiced microscopist. One naturally turns to our insane asylums as the proper field for this class of

studies. Little positive pathology has, however, thus far been furnished by these institutions. The clinical aspects of disease have been most carefully noted, the results of treatment fully appreciated, but insanity in its positive scientific relations has not advanced.

Here, then, is presented a large and inexhaustible field of study. Mind and thought may not necessarily be materialized, but positive relations may be established between certain aberrations of intellect and organic changes in the delicate tissue of the brain.

To the State of New York belongs the honor of first recognizing the importance in its medical aspect of this subject to the welfare of society and the demands of medical science, by the establishment, in connection with the State Asylum at Utica, of a system of pathological investigations in insanity, by the appointment of a *special pathologist*, as one of the medical staff, charged with such duty. As may be well known to the profession, Dr. Gray, the medical superintendent of that institution, after due investigation brought the subject to the attention of the board of managers, who warmly seconded the project, and urged it upon the consideration of the Legislature in 1869.

Governor Hoffman, fully alive to the importance of results accruing from such investigations, made it the subject of recommendation in his message to the Legislature in 1870, and in conformity with his suggestion a law was passed by that body authorizing the appointment. The board of managers designated Dr. Edward R. Hun to the position, and hereafter the reports emanating from that institution will, I doubt not, possess an additional interest to the profession.

In addition to the careful records which have always been kept during life of cases, a minute autopsy is made of every death, and the brain after hardening subjected to microscopic examination. It will not of course be expected that positive results can at once flow from such labors; often a long series of observations are requisite to establish a single fact; yet such fact once recognized becomes at once a standpoint for grouping many disconnected and dissimilar observations.

The appointment of a pathologist to the Asylum for the Insane at Utica was one in which I, as a manager of the institution, took a deep interest. This class of unfortunates, increasing so rapidly in our highly wrought civilization, demands that the utmost limit of positiveness be attained in everything which relates, not only to the causes, but also to the effects of these mental maladies. When other States shall have followed our example, and when a corps of painstaking, conscientious observers shall be formed in the many institutions of this kind, I doubt not results will flow which will add to the scientific

claims of medicine, and humanity be oftener spared the saddest of afflictions, a reason dethroned, a mind lost from the image of its Maker.

I would suggest that the society make proper recognition of its appreciation of the labors and results which are being accomplished in the army medical museum at Washington, in behalf of medical science. The results which have been obtained in photographing tissue under high magnifying power mark an era in histology and pathology, and make the observations of a favored few the common property of the profession. The labors of those engaged in this skilled undertaking should be encouraged by the approval and support of medical men.

It affords me pleasure to comply with the suggestions of the New York Medico-Historical Society, that there be a complete registration of the regular medical profession of the State; also, that each county society have a committee on registration, whose duty shall be to prepare and preserve a complete list of the past and present members of the society; also, to forward on or before the first of March, annually, a list of the names, post-office addresses, and office hours of all the regular practitioners of medicine in their county, to the editor of the "New York Medical Register." The value and necessity of this publication are so fully recognized, as to need no special commendation.

During the past year the record of mortality has been unusually numerous, both among honorary and permanent members. Among the list of honorary members is one whose memory will be blessed, and who can truly be regarded a *benefactor* of his *race*. I refer to Sir James Y. Simpson, late of Edinburgh, universally known to our profession, as indeed to mankind at large, for the introduction of chloroform as an anaesthetic. "He rose from the obscurity of a country village to be the favorite of his sovereign; the peer of the highest literary and scientific authorities; the cynosure of the medical and surgical intellect of this century. It was as if by magic, but his only talisman was the perfect bravery, persistency, sincerity and simplicity of his life. Quick to perceive, he was equally apt in executing. He expended no unnecessary force; he begrudged no required effort. He was not only the skillful accoucheur and the thoughtful, wise gynœcologist, but his surgical suggestions gave him high position among surgeons." He was taken in the prime of life, not sixty years of age, when ripe experience could have borne valuable fruit; still, the work he had already done will cause his name everywhere

to be a household word, "never to be forgotten as long as the primal curse, from which through God's grace he took the sting, shall lie upon suffering woman."

I recommend that appropriate resolutions be passed by the society, and forwarded to his family.

I must be content with reciting merely the names of other deceased honorary members, each possessing merit and individuality:

Benjamin W. Dudley, Lexington, Ky.; Landon C. Rives, Cincinnati, Ohio; T. G. Geoghegan, Dublin; Charles A. Pope, St. Louis, Mo.

Deceased permanent members are:

Platt Williams, Charles Barrows, Edward Hall, J. H. Reynolds, William B. Bibbins.

The death of Dr. Bibbins is one of peculiar sadness to the society. For some years he had been a regular attendant at our meetings, and taken a deep interest in the proceedings. The vigor of health which pervaded his countenance betokened years of activity and usefulness. There were, in his character, traits which commanded respect, and which made him a most useful member in organizations of this nature.

In addition to his devotion to the interests of the profession, he had a straight-forwardness of purpose, combined with executive ability and rectitude; invaluable traits in positions of trust and responsibility.

Even while I write there comes to me the sad news of the death of a dear friend, a highly gifted and skilled physician. Though not on the list of permanent members, his name had been placed among those eligible, and the society would soon have been honored in his permanent election. I allude to the death of Dr. George T. Elliott. Very few have risen so rapidly to eminence in the profession, or distributed more generously the rich fruits of experience as an aid to his fellow workers. His life has been sacrificed to his ardor, his zeal and the intensity of application in his special department. With his gifted intellect he possessed, also, endearing social qualities, so that his approach to the sick room was greeted no less as the trusted and loving friend than as the skilled physician. Snatched, like the learned BARD, before the zenith of his honors or labors was reached, he leaves in his writings and memory a record of honor.

In conclusion, gentlemen, let me hope our proceedings will be marked by harmony and the spirit of mutual edification, and that the results of our deliberations shall show, what in reality the name of our society imports, the true position of advancement of the profession of the State.

